



# Fort Carson-MEDDAC News

## Hospital plans to mitigate furlough pains for patients

By Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Jeff Troth, MEDDAC PAO

The Department of Defense's mandatory furlough begins this week. More than 1,250 civilians with the Fort Carson Medical Department Activity will be out of the hospital and its clinics for 11 days, or 88 work hours, from July to September. To mitigate the effects of the furlough on patients, the hospital leadership has developed a plan which allows the clinics to continue to see patients without compromising on the standard of care given.

"The furlough will not affect the quality or safety of care we give our patients," said Col. Thomas Rogers, Fort Carson Medical Department Activity's deputy commander for clinical services. "Our clinics will remain open and manned by the same active duty providers who are there on other days.

"We will lose the majority of our (civilian) employees on Fridays, but there are many clinics that are spreading out the furlough time (during the week) to allow us to carry on our daily missions."

To keep in step with the rest of Fort Carson, the majority of the hospital's civilians will take Fridays off as their mandatory furlough day.

"Friday is generally our lowest demand day in the (family medicine) clinics," said Maj. Ramona Decker, head nurse for Family Medicine Services. "But, we also wanted to follow what the post was doing, since a lot of our staff have spouses who also work on post and are being furloughed on Friday."

On Fridays clinics will be staffed by active duty personnel. Instead of a civilian nurse screening patients Army medics will do that task. In order to compensate for the personnel shortages, Warrior Family Medicine Clinic will be closed so their military staff can join forces with the Iron Horse Family Medicine Clinic staff. Robinson Family Medicine Clinic will remain open during the furlough. Beneficiaries with acute issues may be referred to these two clinics.

"For inpatient care and pediatrics, our nursing staff are rotating their furlough days (during the week), so we will have RNs and LPNs available throughout the week," said Lt. Col. Julie Tullberg, chief of the Department of Medicine.

Even with the consolidation, the clinics will not be at full staffing on their furlough days. This means they will not be able to see the same number of patients as on a normal day. Pediatrics has 12 providers that each see an average of 17-20 patients a day. Of those 12, only four providers are active duty and will be working on the furlough days. So, instead of seeing almost 250 patients a day, the clinic will see around 80 on Fridays.



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“Because we are not going to have our normal nursing staff, we are not going to have routine immunizations in the pediatrics clinic on Fridays,” said Tullberg. “So if you need a well baby appointment it will not be scheduled on a Friday.”

The allergy, dermatology and neurology clinics have numerous active duty providers. The civilian nurses there are rotating their days off in order to continue to provide appointments on Fridays, although they will still have fewer appointments available than Mondays through Thursdays.

“We are asking that on Fridays patients make appointments only for acute concerns, things that can’t wait until Monday,” said Decker.

“Nearly 80 percent of staffing of Evans Army Community Hospital comes from our dedicated civilian staff,” said Lt. Col. Eric Poulsen, Fort Carson Medical Department Activity’s deputy commander for administration. “On furlough days there will be some increases in wait times and fewer appointments, but, we have made every effort to minimize the impact on our patients.”

While the majority of the hospital’s civilian staff are scheduled to work one less day a week through September, more than 330 civilians will not be affected by the furlough.

“We have exemptions that are in place that enable us to continue our critical missions, such as inpatient services and OB,” said Rogers. “These exemptions were determined on a strictly clinical basis, of what areas needed to be open.”

The hospital leadership has included in their furlough mitigation plan contingencies for when staff must work past their regular duty day.

“Overtime is not something that we are going to disregard, we know that we are going to need overtime,” said Rogers. “If we have mothers that are laboring we have to have staff present. We are not going to send someone home just because of the furlough. Patient care will always come first and we will be able to allow overtime in those cases.”

“We want our patients to know a few things,” said Decker. “If they need care on Friday we are open and here for them, and the quality of care they receive on furlough days will be equal to any other day they visit us.”



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## EACH Furlough Summary



### TIPS FOR PATIENTS:

- Pharmacy: Go early or go late in the day when volume is lower. For prescriptions with refills remaining, call 524-4081.
- Use Secure Messaging Service (SMS): SMS is a web based tool that allows patients to ask questions, request refills, or search for patient information.
- Use the ER only for Emergencies.
- Access to Appointments. Schedule appointments Monday through Thursday when clinics are operating at higher capability. Fridays will be primarily limited to acute/urgent needs.

- Clinics closed on Fridays:
  - Primary Care: Premier clinic, Warrior Family Medicine Clinic (consolidated with Iron Horse),
  - Specialty: Acupuncture/Chiro, Audiology, Disease Management, Nutrition Care clinic, Pain Clinic, SRP Center
- Limited access (~50%) on Mondays & Fridays:
  - Primary Care: Internal Medicine and Pediatrics
  - Specialty: Allergy, Audiology, ENT, General Surgery, Gastroenterology (GI), Optometry / Ophthalmology, Orthopedics, Podiatry, Physical Exams, Wellness Center
- Reduced access (~80%):
  - Specialty: Behavioral Health, OB/GYN, Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Urology

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